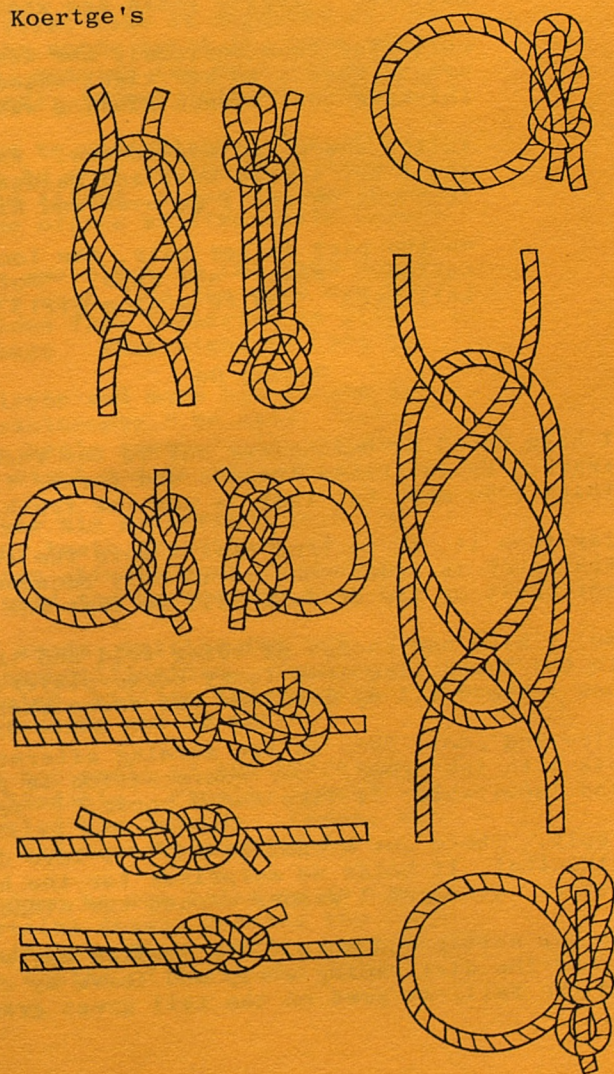


Ronald B. Koertge's



TIES THAT BIND



## My Old Lady

is sitting on the floor separating the trading cards she found in her old suitcase. Twelve years ago when she

collected them seriously she was prancing around Peoria in her tight-assed levis thinking that French kissing was for

fallen women and sophomores. When I think about her little butt and maiden's head it moves me and I go over and kiss her

on the part in her hair. She looks up and smiles. "What?" she says. "Nothing," I tell her. "You're a nice girl, that's all."

## Making Do

I have moved my belongings out to the race track. My faithless friends and former fiance think I am mad, but that is not the truth,

far from it. It is true that I love the track, that much is true. But it is only because she does not cheat or lie or just tell me that she loves

me. I have had enough of being told and then left in the lurch like some funky horse-player. So now I spend all my mornings out there where it's

nice and cool. Then in the warming afternoons I mix with the crowd. Our conversation is patterned and inevitable: "I like the 3 horse." "Yes," I

reply, "She's got a shot at it." I love dialogue like that, it holds no surprises for the honest lover. At night I wander around the stands, listening

to her settle and moan. She excites me, so I cross the dirt racing strip and leave my clothes on the rail, my seed on the tall green grass.



Leo Meek

The first time it happened he hid in the woods until the moon went down, scaring the hell out of the friendly forest folk who couldn't

begin to understand. The next afternoon he went to the only doctor he could afford, a man without a phone whose office shifted mysteriously

from one block to the next nearly every week. On the wall was his diploma from Transylvania City College. That night he held up

a mirror and made his diagnosis: "Lycanthrophy," he said, "rarer than hen's teeth." Leo watched all night and in the morning

he saw his splendid muzzle and shiny teeth dwindle to the lackluster chinlessness of himself. He paid the doctor and took to

the woods, waiting for the transmogrification. Then he prowled, killing and feeding, pretending not to notice

the hot smell of the bitch who trailed him. Finally gorged, he growled his demands. Cowed, she ate and then he mounted her.

By dawn he was holed up in his room, curtains drawn, cursing the light, hating his flabby body, waiting for the coming of night and life.



## The Mating Season

Our nameless, sexless cat is pretty casual about things, but ever since that operation she's been kind of strange. There she sits, listening to them scream and screw and as far as you can see she's like a eunuch at his first orgy, interested but not quite sure what all the fuss is about. She always wants to go outside on these warm, noisome nights so I let her, but she always comes right back in. She does not understand why she is suddenly persona non grata. The only male who pays any attention to her at all is a scarred old fighter who I suspect is a pederast anyway. One night she and I watched out the upstairs window while hulking toms with pool-cue tools arched and shrieked for the hot little number from up the block. She looked so sad I thought of fastening a little bag of cat-nip to her tail so she'd get some kind of action, but would I send my ugly daughter to school in falsies? Probably not, so all we can do is play games indoors: Get the Lump, Chase the Horse, and our favorite, Hideout, where we just lay low until the heat's off.



## The Black Thumb

He lived alone. Had a kitten but it died. Got a puppy from the pound but it ran off yelping.

One day he made a little garden out in back of his rooming house and planted a few seeds. They never came up.

A little later he bought a potted plant and put it on top of the t.v. The next morning even the dirt was gone.

On Saturday he went out to the park, laid on his back and thought things over. When he got up all the grass was yellow where he'd been lying like a rock or something had been there for months.

And you know that big tree out in Calif. that's so famous and the cars can drive through and all?

Well, that whole area is roped off and troops are all over the place with orders to shoot to kill.

## Late

It is the kind of night when I would welcome the things I am usually most afraid of:

"Over here, Slasher." You know where the jugular is, don't you? Good, then let's get down to business.

Up here, Maniac Shotgun Killer. I've got a big bull's-eye painted on my chest. Let's see some fancy shooting.

Oh, Strangler, I'm down here. And don't even bother with the stories about the leaky toilet or the bum furnace. Just get a good grip, okay?"

It is that kind of night. The windows are open, locks sprung, doors swinging wide in the wind.

Come and get me, whatever you are. But hurry up, please. Every second counts.



What did Tarzan know. He'd lived alone for thirty four years and then all of a sudden this female dropped out of the sky and made him build a treehouse. In the daytime she ordered him around and at night she mumbled to him in a language he couldn't understand.

"Darling," she said. "My noble savage. You've got so much to give. Call me Jane and get a haircut, won't you?"

He had to admit she was better in the sack than Cheetah, but that could have been because she was taller. Tarzan didn't really know.

"You're not much in the think department, are you, baby?" said Jane a few months after the nuptials. And not long after that she brought out some long pants.

"Put these on stupid," she said. "I don't want you walking around with your yo-yo hanging down when the baby comes. God, what a jerk."

Well, Tarzan understood that all right and he was good and mad: "I pissed," he said, picking up on his sweetheart's vocabulary. But he got it out of his system by diving into the river and opening up an alligator or two.

Somehow he kept a level head all through the pregnancy, but he didn't know what piles were, either. Jane, on the other hand, was treating him worse all the time:

"What about a moniker for junior here," she said one day, "or is that asking too much from a banana-brain?"

"Tantor?" said Tarzan. "Tantor good name. Or Simba. You like Simba?"



"Yea," she said. "Simba's great. 'Ladies and gentlemen, the new President of the United States, Simba.' Honest to Christ. I wonder what I ever saw in a ding-a-ling like you."

It was back to the alligators for Tarzan.

A little later the baby was

born and Jane called it Otto.

"I like that name," she said. "It's the same forwards or backwards."

"That's a stupid reason," her husband said. "Boy's good enough for me." She gave him the finger and locked the bedroom door permanently. Tarzan liked sleeping in the guest room and they got along that way for years. But one day to his utter horror he found that he was impotent.

"Good," said his wife. "I dug it at first, but later on it made me kind of sick."

Tarzan didn't know what to do, none of the roots and herbs he ate worked worth a damn and he didn't trust Jane to suggest a good psychiatrist. Then one day while he was thinking about his problem and Jane was taking a swim his son stopped him in the hall.

"I wish you'd gone to college, Tarz," said Otto. "What if Harvard finds out my old man's a goddamned gorilla?"

Tarzan broke the boy's neck with one deft movement and then he threw his body out the window where the lions ate it. Then he tore off his suit and dove into the river. He crawled along the bottom until he got underneath his wife, then he shot to the surface and opened her up with his trusty knife.

When he got out of the water he discovered he had a hard-on.

"Goddamn it," he said. "That's great." Then he heard a rustling behind him and when he looked over his shoulder and saw Cheeta with a big banana in her mouth he knew everything was going to be all right.



## Monody

Being happy with someone just makes me nervous.  
Even when things are best around here I start  
in on myself. Either the black pixies come  
and stomp around in my skull or the inside

of the oven starts looking good. On this good  
day I think of my wife: her sweetness, her postures,  
her cheating heart. Oh, she does not philander  
now, there are no cigar stubs in the ash trays or

jockey shorts in the glove compartment, but somewhere  
out there is a boy hitchhiking in from Topeka. He has  
more style, more grace, more hair than me. And though  
she will not condone the theft, he is going to stride

into one of her classes in his seven league desert boots  
and steal her ghostly heart. I see him now leading her  
behind the bushes outside the library. Listen -- "Oh,  
daddy, give it to me daddy. I never had nothin' like

this at home." Oh jesus. Scared to death I sprint down-  
stairs and put my head in her lap. She looks down fondly  
as I say over and over, "I love you, I love you, I love  
you." She does not suspect that I am talking to myself.

Chuck, Gerry, Karl and I

are doing fine in Long Beach's 49er Bar.  
During our comic pool games we talk about  
ontology, pussy, the state of the nation,  
pussy, rights of the individual vs. rights  
of the world-at-large and of course pussy.

But then, right in the middle of an important  
discussion centering around the length of time  
a lady could be dead before she was considered  
absolutely out of the question, the hairdresser  
from next door walks in.

She is an attractive girl, one of the sort who  
turns men's heads so often that the chiropractic  
business is up 22% in the beach cities. So  
we look at her legs and watch her walk and  
creak our own necks. Then she leaves with  
her ham and cheese.



And she takes something with her: Even if it is true that she wears thirteen pairs of cotton panties, even if it is true that between those expensive thighs lies the crotch of a mannequin, even if it is true that she is as unaccessible as a nun she nevertheless stops the day --

Beer goes flat, eight balls disappear, cues wilt in the act of shooting. Clearly, the game is over.

### A Family of One

Yesterday I was informed  
that I had a cancer.  
Do you think that caught  
me off guard?

Think again. I knew it  
all the time and had, in  
fact, informed them. The  
medicine men

Pooh-poohed me, but I  
knew. I would have known  
that cancer anywhere. I  
raised it

from birth. Like a child  
conceived in wine and haste  
it came unwanted but once here  
I nurtured it.

Nightly in my closet I bloodied  
myself, brought myself to bear  
against myself, fed it bruises  
and scabs.

Now they tell me I would have  
months more to live if I had  
been more careful. Piffle. That  
is all they know  
of motherhood.



## The Interlocutor

At eight in the morning I put on my dark suit and sit in the front room right next to the low, screened window. It is not that I am old and bored and have nothing else to do, on the contrary, I have a great deal of responsibility.

At half-past the mailman stops by and tells me again how much he wants to be a writer. He imagined that by carrying loads of prose he would more or less absorb a feeling for style, but it doesn't seem to be working.

I suggest to him that Freddy Zip Code is his muse and a novel composed entirely of numbers might be just what the world is looking for.

From next door comes the wife of a men's-room-attendant-and-philosopher. She confesses that she longs for Tony Curtis, that she has a life-size picture of him that she sleeps with but lately she has started to feel cold and distant toward it. What should she do?

I advise her to purchase a life-size photo of Steve McQueen. Tony Curtis, as everyone knows, is a flit.

They come and go all afternoon, and by evening the street is full of them: the M.D. who believes in chiropractors, the shy gardener who cannot call a spade a spade, the butcher who beats his meat. They wait patiently in the glow of the street lights, enjoying



the smell of begonias in the cool night air  
and eventually I hear them all.

Then I stand and sigh,  
pull the shade  
retire to my bedroom.

As I take off my goofy vestments, the real or imaginary problems I have  
solved or complicated  
sadden me for a moment, but no longer than that.  
In fact, the entire period of grief consists of just the time it takes  
to lay my head on the pillow and whisper  
Boo Hoo.

Then I grin, turn out the light  
and go to sleep.

Pour Vous, Agnes

You have stopped at the Smile Shop on your way  
Home, and now your purchase hangs precariously  
In front of your teeth.

You are secure because you know I cannot leave  
The house. You think I tinker away my time  
On nonsense.

That is all you know. Right now in the basement  
There is the slightest glow and the tiniest hum  
From a machine of my own invention.

The gears and pulleys from my first wife's heart,  
The screws that were loose for so long, the levers  
And chains of my misfortunes: they are all  
Cunningly assembled into a device which will,  
I feel certain, take your breath away.



## At the Los Angeles County Fair

there is a lion who waits through the races to  
perform at night  
in front of the grandstand. He has the only shade around  
and he lies in the shadows

while the bettors in the infield and the horses on the  
track circle around him.  
I look forward to seeing the lion every September during  
the short racing season out there.  
When I stand by his cage to read the Racing Form my luck  
seems to improve,

if only a little, and that is a comforting thought in the  
spring when betting is precarious  
and the fillies and mares are not thinking about running  
but of enormous, haunchy stallions.

Once in 1966, after a fine day, I successfully resisted  
the temptation to  
smuggle in some delicacy for the lion. I have always been  
glad that I did not do that.  
From the beginning our relationship has been without  
sentimentality or need for  
compensation. It has been as clean as his sharp, white  
teeth.

Yesterday when the fair opened for the new season I drove  
out and the lion was  
nowhere to be found. And though I asked anyone who would  
listen to me, no one in the circus nor  
any of the fair officials seemed to know anything about it.

## Things They Don't Tell You in History Class

The name, for example, of the  
man who first used the phrase,  
"The only good indian is a dead  
indian."

He was called Oklahoma Charlie,  
a little-known scout for the  
Army who was -- besides being a  
necrophiliac -- was queer as a  
three dollar bill.

Live and learn.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena, Calif.